THE

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS BEARINGS

OF THE

CORN LAW.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED IN

NEW WINDSOR CHAPEL, SALFORD,

AUGUST 22, 1841

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"Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?"—PSALM xciv. 20.

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INTRODUCTION.

Although in the following Lecture the Corn Law is more especially referred to, the author by no means wishes to intimate that there are no other laws to which the remarks and reasonings which it contains can apply. There is a whole system of bad enactments which, on the same grounds, demands the reprobation of every humane and religious mind.

The Lecture contains nothing new. The text has been used for the same purpose before, and will be used for it again. The facts, alas! are not novel; and it is some consolation to know that the reasonings present no novelty either. The Lecture is published just for the purpose for which it was delivered—to do good; and if it shall do this, in however small a degree, the author will be abundantly satisfied.

1 KINGS v. 10—12.

"So Hiram gave Solomon cedar trees and fir trees according to all his desire. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year. And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon: and they two made a league together."

It is the duty of a minister to state and apply the principles of christian morals, to denounce sin, to rebuke iniquity, whether legal or illegal, whether in high places or in low. The Corn Law appears to me a sinful and wicked thing, and therefore I denounce and rebuke it. The fact of its being a law, so far from constituting a reason for not meddling with it, seems to be just the strongest possible reason for doing so. It is its legal character and operation which makes it the mischievous thing it is, and which involves in it the moral character of the country. If it were some private or personal sin, its guilt would be confined to an individual or a class, and its consequent miseries would be local and limited; but, inasmuch as it is the enactment of a great country, millions participate in its wickedness and its woe. Besides, my religion teaches me charity to the poor. The gospel requires this as a sign and evidence of its operation. Now the poor are deeply

interested in the present subject. Believing as I do, sincerely, that the corn law produces more poverty than all other causes put together, excepting, perhaps, drunkenness, how can I evince my charity to the poor, if I do not, in every possible way, seek its utter extinction? Surely, if I feel it a duty to contribute of my property to keep others from starving, it is my duty to endeavour to destroy laws which make them starve; and if I should not think the sanctuary or the sabbath desecrated by the advocacy of a temporal charity, I cannot suppose that their sanctity is violated by an attempt to promote the abolition of the Corn Law. "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath-day, or to do evil?" The subject may be political, but what of that? Because men have chosen to make bad laws upon various subjects, are they thus placed beyond the lawful province of the minister of Christ? Have no political subjects a moral and religious bearing? May not moral and religious principles be applied to them? May not moral and religious interests be affected by them? I am happy to be unable to point out any religious class from whom this objection can come consistently. Not from the Church of England; for its condition and character as an Establishment involves the most direct and perfect union of religion and politics that ingenuity can invent, or power and authority bring to pass. Not from our Wesleyan brethren; for it is not long since their ministers generally thought it right to condemn from their pulpits a government bill of education. Not from the great mass of dissenting sects; for a few years ago slavery and apprenticeship formed the topics of ministerial discourse among them throughout the length and breadth of the land. If it be wrong to discuss political questions in the pulpit, "let him that is without sin cast the first stone."

I propose to confine myself to the moral and religious bearings of the Corn Law, because these are most appropriate to the present occasion and place, and because they are the most important.

I. It is a violation of justice.

It is a tax upon bread. You may deny that it is a tax, but a tax it is nevertheless. It makes bread dearer than it otherwise would be. It is meant to do it. This is its plain design and natural operation. It would not answer any of the purposes contemplated by it, it would be an utter failure, it would falsify the hopes and the reasonings of its authors and its advocates, if it did not enhance the price of bread; and for this reason it is offensive. The things by which men live should surely be left free as air. Let the ornaments and luxuries of life be taxed, let the comforts and conveniences of life be taxed, but let not the *necessaries* of life be taxed. The iniquity of such a tax appears from its partiality. At first sight, indeed, it might seem impartial on the very ground that it presses upon all without exception, but it is to be remembered that it does not press upon all equally. Supposing the poor to eat only as much bread as the rich, it is obvious that a law which raises the price of bread affects the poor more than the rich. It may be that the poor spend half or a quarter of their income upon this first article of subsistence, but the rich may not spend upon it more than a hundredth or a thousandth part of theirs. In such a case the poor are taxed by it far more heavily than the rich; for taxes, like gifts, are to be measured by ability. But the fact is, that the poor consume more bread than the rich. The nature of their occupations requires strength, which can only result from solid and nutritious food, and plenty of that; whereas the rich may have recourse to other and more pleasant, though less nourishing provision.

We have spoken of the Corn Law as a tax, and a tax it is. But while it is so in all that is offensive and injurious, it is not so in anything that is good and useful. It comprises all the evils, and some of the excellencies of a tax. It yields but little revenue, comparatively, to the state. The money which it exacts goes not, for the most part, to purposes of govern-

ment. It is, up to a certain point, a prohibition. It says, virtually, up to that point, not, "All the corn that enters the country shall pay so much," but, "None shall enter." The consequence of this is, that the people, whose daily bread is thus made dearer than it otherwise would be, have not the consolation of knowing that the money which it costs them over and above what it should cost them, goes to the maintenance of national order, and dignity, and peace; but the mortification of knowing that it goes into the hands of a class, and of a small class too; for it is not the agricultural labourers nor the farmers that are benefitted by it, but the landowners; not those who rent and till the land, but those who own it. These are the real parties for whom the corn law exists. It is useless to deny it. Now, suppose that, instead of being put into the shape of a Corn Law, the same thing had been put into another shape; suppose it had been enacted that certain persons in every district of the land should collect so much money annually from each of its inhabitants, and that the money thus collected should go into the hands of this section of the community. What then? Why, every individual out of this section would see at once the injustice of the matter. But now, because this is done, not directly and manifestly but indirectly and under colour of something else, although millions go yearly from the whole nation to this small class, people can be found, not only among those who receive, but among those who pay, to look on, some with indifference and some even with approbation!

But this is not all. The Corn Law is unjust, not only because it is a tax upon bread, and, as such, presses unequally, and benefits a class at the expense of the nation, but it is a violation of the rights of labour. It is the miserable operation of this law, not only to make food dear, but to diminish the means of obtaining it. It is God's curse upon man, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." That curse dooms to painful and wearying toil, but it also involves temporal sup-

port as the result of that toil. Surely this grievous allotment of God should not be aggravated by man ! But in this, as in other cases, human wickedness increases the painfulness of the divine dispensation, and, as has been well remarked, the Corn Law says, " Thou shalt *not* eat bread in the sweat of thy face." It thus interferes with a right, for labour is a right. God that gives the ability to labour, gives the right to labour. It is a man's own property, as it is the foundation and condition of all property. It is as much a man's own as his limbs, and his senses, and his soul ; for what are these to him, if by them he may not obtain his living ? To prevent a man's employment of his labour for his preservation and welfare, is the greatest injustice. Where is the difference between doing this, and making him a slave ? Is it not as wrong to say to him, " You shall not work," as to say to him, " You shall work, but you shall not work for yourself ?" Now, the Corn Law prevents the labour of multitudes at this moment. The case is this. The people of this country might find a ready market for the fruit of their toil in other countries, under a system of fair and righteous legislation. Under the present system, oppressive and injurious as it is, they do export immense quantities of their manufactures, and, under a better, they might export still greater. America and other nations are saying to us, " We want the articles you produce, but we have not money with which to buy them; but we are richly favoured with the means of raising corn, and this we will give in exchange for them, if you will allow us so to do." But the Corn Law answers, " No, it shall not be ; our people are able and willing to produce what you require, and you are able and willing to give in exchange for it what they require ; but, rather than suffer the exchange, our mills shall be closed, and our people shall perish." This is injustice. What right has any one to come between the labour of the industrious and the food on which they live ? The language of multitudes in this distressed land is, " We ask you not to make laws which will

give an unnatural value to our labour, but only to destroy laws which take from us the opportunity of availing ourselves of the natural value of our labour; we want not to be kept in idleness, but to be permitted to toil; we pray not that they should eat who will not work, but only that they who wish to work should be allowed to do so, that they may eat. God has given us the ability to sustain ourselves by our industry; do not you take it away." The request is right and just, and the refusal of it is wrong and wicked.

II. The Corn Law is chargeable with inhumanity.

We know what God thinks about the poor. He has told us to remember them. He has said that he that giveth to the poor lendeth to Him. He has revealed himself as their friend, and guardian, and avenger. Now, what is the state of thousands of the poor in this country? I allude to it with sorrow and sickness of heart. But it must not be concealed. During the past week we have had reports from all parts of the kingdom, made by men whose office brings them into contact with the misery and wretchedness that prevails.* They speak one language. They unite in telling one unvarnished and unvaried tale of want and woe. There is not one exception. From north, and south, and east, and west, the testimony is that never scarcely was there known such deep and general suffering. There is not an oasis in the wilderness. What with actual destitution on the one hand, and the apprehension of it on the other, the prevailing misery is universal and intense. Multitudes are utterly without the most common necessaries of life, and multitudes have but a poor and paltry supply of them. Private charity and legal relief are entirely inadequate to meet the grievous necessity that appears in every quarter. Starvation, literal starvation from want of food, is continually taking place. Children are crying for bread, and

* Referring to the Ministerial Conference on the Corn Law held in Manchester in the week preceding the delivery of this lecture.

there is none; the most sacred and tender memorials of life and love are bartered for a momentary satisfaction of the claims of natural appetite; there is "cleanness of teeth in all our cities;" and brave and noble hearts, almost worn out by deprivation, are saying, "They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger; for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the earth." And what is the cause of this? Is there no corn to be had? The earth yields enough for all that dwell upon it. God has made full provision for every living thing. "He crowns the year with his goodness; and his paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Are there no means of conveying or purchasing this corn? The providence of God and the ingenuity of man have made abundant provision for its safe and rapid transferance to our shores, and they that are perishing for want are in possession of that for which it might be obtained. Wherefore, then, the heart-rending and wide-spread misery? It is because men have made a law which practically says, "However rich and plentiful the corn of other countries, it shall not be admitted to our own except for that which we have not to give for it. It may be consumed by the brutes, it may rot upon the ground, it may be cast into the sea, but it shall not fill the hearts of our famishing millions with food and gladness." The cry of the destitute is rendered infinitely more distressing than it otherwise would be by the character and conduct of those from whom it comes. It is the cry of an active, energetic, and independent people, who, as Baptist Noel truly observes, "for no fault of theirs, are suffering the pain of hunger with all the physical and moral evils which accompany it. God has provided for them corn, not in their own crowded country, but in others less densely peopled. They have the ability to buy it by their labour, if the law forbids not," and they are ready

and anxious to give that labour for that corn. They do not want to live upon private or public alms, and it would not be well, even were it possible, for them to do so; they are far above such dependence; their spirit is too noble and and generous to permit them to be willingly indebted to others for their daily food. They want, not to be supported, but to support themselves; the God of nature has provided them with strong arms and clear minds, and has opened channels in which their healthy and honest industry might flow, and they ask to be left in the full and unfettered enjoyment of their personal powers and God's providence. Is it not melancholy that any should be found willing to preserve laws which doom them to idleness and want?

I feel that I should not be treating my subject aright did I not glance at the state and prospects of agricultural labourers. It is said that however much a change in the law might benefit others it would inflict on them an unspeakable injury. Nothing can be more incorrect. The fact is that, when best off, they are in a far worse condition than other labourers; that they suffer much from the high price of bread, no corresponding rise taking place in their wages; that at the present time they are in a miserable state even in England, and in Ireland, which is to be ruined by the abolition of the Corn Law, they are nearly as badly off as it is possible to be; and that if the Corn Law were repealed there is no just reason to suppose that they would be involved in any greater wretchedness, to say the least. But the case is to be put in a still stronger light. We have to consider not only what would be the state of agricultural labourers if the Corn Law were abolished, but also to consider their state if not abolished. The population is increasing at the rate of more than a thousand souls per day. What is to become of them? The land cannot find occupation for them. They must be employed in manufactures. It is these which have employed the surplus population of agricultural districts which would otherwise have

been in an infinitely more pitiable plight than they are now. If the present markets for our manufactures abroad are not kept, and new ones found, the agriculturists must suffer keenly when the thousands of unemployed artizans seek employment and support from the soil; the labourer will suffer from the competition thus created lowering his wages, and the farmer from the increase of poor rates rendered necessary to the bare existence of the people. All are alike interested in the present subject, and let us not forget that every day the case becomes more distressing. The number of mouths to be supplied is being continually augmented, and the means of supply are being continually diminished. It is not at our option what we shall do. We cannot put a check upon population. We cannot reduce it or keep it within any fanciful limits. As its tide pours into our already crowded towns we cannot say, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." We must open new outlets for our commerce, or we perish; and the Corn Law says, "You shall not."

It is not difficult to discover how God regards the inhuman operation of this law. "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him; but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it." The Corn Law does, in effect, deprive people of bread, for it not only raises its price, but takes away the power of purchasing it. "Go to, now, ye rich men, and weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." This is God's judgment upon those who pay not for work done; think you he has a less severe judgment for those who prevent the doing of it? The Corn Law deprives the poor of part of

their wages by making them pay more than they ought for bread, and to a great extent it hinders their earning of wages at all. Can God regard it with approval? "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that ye bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" Thus did the prophet rebuke the hypocrisy of the people in his day who sought vainly to substitute the symbols of grief for the principles of morality, and confession of sin for departure from it. Do not his words apply to us, and suggest, and enforce our duty? Are we bound to relieve the poor and not bound to seek the abolition of laws which engender poverty? Is it an imperative obligation to lessen suffering, and not one to prevent it? Is it a duty to support the needy, and not a duty to enable them to support themselves? It is, to say the least, a very mistaken charity which exerts itself to remove a portion of the effect, and that for a time, and does not try to destroy the main cause, and that for ever.

III. The Corn Law is a violation of the obvious intention of the God of heaven and earth.

God's will is to be found in nature as well as in the Bible. We may, from the constitution of the human mind and body, from the state and condition of society, from the character and resources of the various countries of the earth, conclude as safely and easily respecting his designs on many subjects, as from the Bible. Now, one fact which nature and providence clearly teach us is this—the mu-

tual dependence of different nations, and the policy and propriety of the intercourse which that dependence suggests. It may sound as well, as it is easy, to talk of one country being entirely able to do without the aid and contributions of all other countries, but the heavens and the earth, the history of the world, and, in our own case, the facts of every day and every hour reprove it. We are dependent—we must be dependent. Every thing shows that God intends that we should be. If we look abroad upon the various countries of the earth we discover a great diversity in their resources. All lands are not alike, nor all people. Climates, soils, atmospheres, national capabilities, the moral, and intellectual, and physical characters of the inhabitants, all present a beautiful and beneficial variety. Instead, therefore, of nations considering how they may best erect themselves into a posture of proud independence, it becomes them to fulfil the evident pleasure of their common Father who "hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation," and, in doing this, has made it the interest of all to seek and promote the interests of each. This cannot be without a free and fair interchange of the various commodities and productions of each. The course which the divine dispensations suggest is the course to which divine revelation has affixed its most solemn and sacred sanction. We are too much accustomed to consider the men of other countries as if they came not within the scope of the sympathies and dispositions of the religion of Christ. We fall into the Jewish error of restricting the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour," to our own countrymen. This is wrong. We are of one nature and one origin with the inhabitants of all countries. Differences of locality, and language, and creed, do not affect the principles of justice and benevolence which we are bound to show to all alike and every where. When, therefore, we are enjoined to love our neighbour with the same love with

which we regard ourselves; to owe no man any thing, but to love one another; to do unto others as we would they should do unto us, we are not to imagine that these precepts relate only to individual action, but should consider them as rules and grounds of national obligation. We have no right, therefore, to pursue the exclusive interest of our own country, even if we could secure it apart from the welfare of other countries. It is not enough that we ask what will promote our own wealth, and honour, and strength; we must take an enlarged and generous view of the good of universal humanity, and inasmuch as a large and liberal commercial intercourse must be no less beneficial to others than to ourselves, we must regard the divine injunctions to impartial love as arguments drawn direct from the Bible in favour of unrestricted trade. But this is not all. We have the express sanction of God on behalf of the course of national conduct which we are advocating. Our text supplies that sanction. Solomon sent to Hiram, king of Tyre, intimating his purpose of building a house for God, requesting that timber might be prepared by his servants for that end, because there were among his own subjects "none that could skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians." In return for this Hiram required a supply of food. The result was a treaty; corn was given on the one hand and skill upon the other; and that we may know that God approved of this, we are told, in close connection with the mention of the league, and in reference to it, that "the Lord gave Solomon wisdom."

Now, what are the facts as to our own country in relation to other countries? We have an immense population already, and it is increasing at the rate of a million within less than three years; we have attained to a most important position as a manufacturing nation, and we have the means of attaining to a still more important one. But we cannot grow corn enough for our own consumption, and even the present supply is, to a considerable extent, the fruit of a law which induces men to grow corn on land which was never meant for

any such purpose, by granting a protection which cripples our energies and destroys our trade. But, look abroad, and what do we see? Why, to take America alone, there is a country which has the soil and the facilities for raising corn enough to supply almost any demand, and which is willing to give it at a reasonable price in exchange for our goods. What is the plain dictate of these facts? Why, "foster your manufactures, which is your interest, and let America grow corn, which is its interest, but do not foolishly injure both countries by trying to be yourselves, and compelling the other to be, what obviously frustrates the benevolent design of God. Thus you shall bless America with the works of your hands, and America bless you with the produce of its soil."

"If God's free bounty bids this globe produce
More than enough for all his creatures' use,
Shall man monopolize the rich supply,
See brutes full fed, while fellow-mortals die?
Forbid it, Heaven! while earth in her rich fields,
For man and beast alike abundance yields,
Free as the winds, and chainless as the sea,
Should intercourse between all nations be,
Wherever land is found, or oceans roll,
Or man exists—from Indus to the Pole.
Then would unfettered industry be paid
In the rich wealth its own free hands had made.
Then would mankind fulfil heaven's first decree,
And earth with "fruitfulness" replenished be.
Then would war's blood-red banners soon be furled,
And peace triumphant reign throughout the world;
While freighted fleets would traverse every sea,
And commerce wing her way, unchecked and free;
Island be linked to island—main to main—
Binding all nature fast in love's harmonious chain."

IV. The Corn Law injuriously affects the moral and religious character of the people.

Want weakens the body, and, through it, the mind, promotes diseases that injure the mind, and checks its ad-

vancement in ten thousand ways. "Why, what a cruel absurdity it seems to talk to a man of intellectual improvement, of cultivating and recreating his mind, when he is ill-housed, ill-clothed, his meals deficient in quantity, and not of a nutritive or stimulating quality, when he has no opportunity for collecting his wandering thoughts, his narrow abode forming no refuge from noise and distraction, his temper incessantly jarred, books not within his reach, or only with difficulty scarcely to be surmounted, and body and soul worn down by carking cares! Is this man in a condition to exert himself for the cultivation of his faculties, and apply to the study of history, of science, or of poetry? The first thing is to put him into such a condition that his mind can have free and fair play; to have him better housed, better clothed, better fed, and then let him begin his mental race, like a giant rejoicing in the freshness of his strength, feeling his new advantages, and gradually rising from the improvement of his physical condition to improvement in his mental condition also."

Poverty exerts a most pernicious influence in checking the education of the young. Accounts from all parts of the country show that education is impeded by the want of work and the high price of food. Nor is it marvellous. They who have the disposition to provide for the education of the people are not so able to do it, and what is a matter of far more importance, the people are not so able to find it for themselves. They will be more likely to take care that their children attend school, if it cost them something, than if it be gratuitous. But if they have not money, they cannot pay for it. The bodily wants are more palpable and urgent than those of the mind, and it is not likely that those who have scarcely anything to eat will contribute a portion of their scanty pittance to secure the instruction of their young. But the inability to pay is only a part of the case. There is an inability still greater to clothe. But the grievance of all is, that the young are so early made

to work for their own support and that of the family. The dearness of provisions and lowness of wages lead to a most pernicious engagement of children in bodily labour at an age which utterly prevents any proper education of their minds. Instead of being sent to school they are sent to the factory; they are labouring when they should be learning; and thus mind and body receive an injury which can never be destroyed.

The effect which poverty directly exerts on morals is bad. If it prevents the filling of the mind with right principles, it supplies temptations which, in their absence, are of the most dangerous kind. The straits and degradation which it occasions are unfavourable to the purity, and refinement, and generosity, and integrity of our nature. Doubtless many will plunder rather than perish. Agur prayed not to be "poor," lest he should "steal;" and it is written, "Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry." It is wrong to steal, without question; but it is too much to suppose that in all cases virtue will be strong enough to refuse so loud a call as starvation. But in other and not less evil ways must the present state of things operate. Multitudes have nothing to do, and idleness is the great nourisher of all iniquity. There is danger of the spirits of men being broken. Self-respect is seriously affected by the necessity of appearing in the world otherwise than as a man likes, or of not appearing at all; of occupying a position beneath his wont and his worth; and of receiving that as a gift which he should possess as a right; and what good and generous passion can grow and thrive in the absence of self-respect? The misery and woe of home prompts to the pursuit of relief and excitement abroad; and the gay and light assembly, the oblivion of drink, the impure and licentious association, these are but too likely to attract those whose wretched dwellings furnish only for the eye cheerless desolation and squalid forms, and for the ear the sigh and bitter plaint of hunger. The heart is closed by

deep and desperate suffering. The finer affections of our nature may be softened and refined by certain measures of grief, but if it be too intense and lasting, they are overwhelmed. The means are not possessed of cultivating benevolence in outward exercises, the pressure of misery checks its flowings forth, and the sense of others' neglect and injustice as its chief cause tends to the restraint of generosity. A cold selfishness is thus generated in hearts which should breathe a free and noble love. Nor is it improbable that the conviction that human wickedness is a main cause of the felt distress should beget hard thoughts, and cherish dispositions of distrust, hatred, and all uncharitableness.

And if you look at religion the case is not relieved. To say nothing of the diminished power of supplying religious truth, (and "money answereth all things" here, as elsewhere,) it is not easy for men who cannot purchase food to provide the means of an attendance on the sanctuary, and it is not in their minds to pay a cool and candid attention to the claims of godliness. It is easy to sermonize on the blessings of poverty, and to congratulate the poor on their peculiar privileges, but it is mockery. The testimony of all whose experience qualifies them to bear it is, that in proportion to the keenness of want are men unfitted for the exercises of religion. It is vain to attempt spiritually to bless those who are struggling against the horrors of starvation. Poverty may no doubt be sanctified, but to the irreligious it is far more frequently a curse than a blessing. It sours and exasperates the soul. And it is further to be remembered, that the efforts of Christians will scarcely be received with the cordial gladness they deserve, when Christian legislation has caused so much of the prevailing distress. Christianity is sorely "wounded in the house" of its own professed "friends."*

* Some of the remarks under this head are quoted from, and some others suggested by, a lecture on the "moral bearings" of the Corn Law question, by W. J. Fox.

V. The Corn Law question is one of peace, and this both at home and abroad.

I do not wish to excite unnecessary fear, but I believe, most solemnly, that if this law be not abolished, the consequences in relation to the internal quiet of our country will be awful. One of the first cries of the French Revolution was for bread, and there are many cries less likely than that to precede a national convulsion. There is great faith to be placed in the peaceable disposition of our countrymen. They have borne, and they do bear, with surprising patience, the grievances under which they labour. But the very spirit which makes them so calm and quiet is the very spirit which, when aroused and exasperated, is most destructive and desolating. It is not likely that a people will perish, and think their perdition is the fruit of wicked laws, without a struggle. If they imagine, rightly or not, that their miseries are unnecessary and unmerited, the probability is, that their patience will not last for ever, but that their indignation will burst forth in scenes too sad and sickening to contemplate. A people compelled to be idle and hungry must possess a temper unheard of yet if they lie calmly down and die. However we may deplore and condemn the employment of violence and brute force in the prosecution of any national object, whether a glorious or infamous revolution, the history of our country and the signs of our times warn us against concluding that its days are past. As, then, you value your country, and would preserve it from strife and anarchy, endeavour to remove unrighteous and oppressive laws.

Peace abroad is connected with our subject. It is true that the Corn Law is advocated on the ground that if we were dependent upon other nations for bread they might starve us. This is, indeed, to be deaf to all the lessons of history, to pour contempt on the conduct of commercial states in all times, to prefer certain misery to a most improbable and unlikely one, to starve ourselves, lest others starve us, and others,

too, whose interest it would be to keep us alive. But the fact is, that the abolition of this law would operate most powerfully in preventing war. Next to the principles of the gospel of peace there is nothing so calculated to promote peace between nations as free trade. Let nations be mutually dependent, and a strong argument would exist against going to war. It is a mistake to suppose that in case of our receiving more corn from abroad in exchange for our manufactures we only should have reason not to quarrel—though this would be something, and a great deal too, for our past history shows that England can originate and promote unnecessary and unjustifiable battles as well as other nations—but those with whom we traded would have reason not to quarrel too. The dependence would not be all on one side, and therefore not the reason for peace. And the reason would be of the most substantial kind. What man seeks a quarrel with another with whom he is on terms of mutual advantage? The first thought is, Can I afford to give up our friendship and intercourse? And if this question were proposed by nations sustaining to each other those relations which we advocate, the answer would be, No! When Solomon and Hiram made the league recorded in the text, it is said, "and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon." And in after-times we are told, "And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus, the king's chamberlain, their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country."* But while in such a state of relations self-interest would have its proper place and force in the prevention of war; mutual knowledge would likewise be promoted, and friendly feelings enkindled and nourished every way unfavourable to war. If, therefore, there is anything horrible in war; if God has cursed it; if there is no evil of which it is not the natural and prolific source; if pestilence and famine, if wrong, cruelty, and licentiousness,

* Acts xii. 20.

if the distress and perplexity of nations, if the brutalizing and degrading of humanity, if the tears and agonies of the orphan and the widow, if the retardation of civilization and religion, follow in its train, let us pray and labour that our own beloved country may be placed in such relations with other countries as shall establish a mutual interest in peace and cherish a mutual indisposition to war.

I have thus glanced at some of the moral and religious bearings of that law of our land which relates to the admission of foreign corn, and only at some of them. Time would fail to allude to all. It is a root of all evil. I believe the misery or the mischief cannot be mentioned which does not spring from it in a greater or less degree. And all its fruits are increasing day by day. The already grievous accumulation of national guilt is being augmented while it remains; the ignorance, and vice, and irreligion of the people is being augmented while it remains; the general distress is becoming wider, and deeper, and more likely to continue, while it remains. Then let every one present arise, and, without violence or threatening, by the force of truth, and charity, and justice, endeavour to remove it. Let each one that hears me gird up his loins and breathe his vow to do his part in this great cause.

The cause has become a religious one. Hundreds of ministers have publicly committed themselves to it in this character. A conference of "men of God" has been held about it, and they have pledged themselves to use every legitimate influence to secure its triumph. How different that assembly from others which the history of the church records! They met, not to pronounce anathemas, but to diffuse blessings; not to foster and express a theological hate, but to feel and show a human love; not to settle the orthodoxy of some incomprehensible proposition or hard word, but to interpret and apply the dictates of an unsophisticated charity; not to dispute about or impose tithe of mint and anise, but to expound and defend the weightier matters of the law—justice and mercy.

They met to take deep counsel respecting the laws of God and the miseries of men, to "take the gauge" of human wretchedness, to listen to the voice of nature and religion, to expose the ignorance of foolish men and denounce the injustice of bad ones, to soothe the sorrows of the widow, the fatherless, and the poor, and to utter the resolves and reveal the power of a "faith which worketh by love." The religious mind of the nation has begun to move on this great question. They that have power with God have begun to pray about it, and unless the righteous Governer of nations have in store for us judgments of too stern and desolating a nature ~~not~~ to be contemplated without dismay and consternation, "the truth is mighty, and it shall prevail."

May we not be first infatuated and then destroyed! May we not be permitted any longer to cripple the energies with which we are endowed, and refuse the food which is put within our reach, and while in our father's house there is enough and to spare, to "perish with hunger!"

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